

Message Text

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ACTION SS-25

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TO SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 1626

C O N F I D E N T I A L CONAKRY 0338

EXDIS

DEPARTMENT PLEASE PASS TO SENIOR LEVEL USIA

E.O. 11652: XGDS4

TAGS: APER

SUBJECT: GUINEAN GOVERNMENT REQUESTS REASSIGNMENT OF PAO BLAND

1. SUMMARY: GOG HAS REQUESTED THAT PAO MERTON BLAND BE REPLACED. VAGUE AND UNSATISFACTORY REASONS CITED FOR THIS ACTION, BUT I TEND TO BELIEVE IT BASED UPON SOME SORT OF INDIVIDUAL HOSTILITY OR FALSIFIED ACCUSATIONS WITHOUT BROAD POLITICAL SIGNIFICANCE. WISH EMPHASIZE THAT BLAND'S DEPARTMENT HAS BEEN PROFESSIONAL AND CORRECT. REQUEST EARLIEST REPLY FROM USIA AS TO EARLIEST PRACTICAL ARRIVAL DATE FOR JONES (OR ANOTHER DYNAMIC AND PERHAPS YOUTHFUL FRENCH SPEAKER). ASSUMING HE CAN COME BY MAY INTEND TO REQUEST GOG PERMIT BLAND TO REMAIN UNTIL REPLACEMENT'S ARRIVAL. CANNOT PREDICT RESPONSE, ALTHOUGH GOG SET NO DEADLINE FOR BLAND DEPARTURE.

2. GUINEAN FONMIN MOROU BALDE SUMMONED ME 17 FEB. IN NERVOUS FASHION, WITH SECRETARY TAKING NOTES, HE SAID GOG VALUED EXCELLENT HISTORICAL RELATIONS AND COOPERATION WITH USG. IN THIS CONTEXT, AND IN SPIRIT OF OPENNESS AND CANDOR WHICH HAD DISTINGUISHED OUR RELATIONS PERSONALLY, HE WISHED FORMALLY TO REQUEST THAT AMERICAN CULTURAL ATTACHE MERTON BLAND LEAVE GUINEA AND BE REPLACED BY ANOTHER OFFICER. IT WAS ESSENTIAL THAT DIPLOMATS KEEP CLEAR OF THE INTERNAL AFFAIRS OF COUNTRIES TO WHICH THEY ACCREDITED. MR. BLAND HAS EXPRESSED OPINIONS AND JUDGMENTS WITH WHICH GOG COULD NOT AGREE.

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3. I TOLD BALDE I WAS ASTONISHED AT THIS ALLEGATION. BLAND WAS A MATURE PROFESSIONAL OFFICER WHO HAD NEVER TO MY KNOWLEDGE BEEN INDISCREET. I REQUESTED SPECIFIC EVIDENCE OF ANY MISBEHAVIOR. BALDE REPEATED THE VAGUE WORDING HE HAD EARLIER USED AND SAID HE COULD NOT BE MORE EXPLICIT. I ASKED WHETHER THIS ACTION WAS TO BE TAKEN AS A POLITICAL SIGNAL AND, IF SO, WHAT WAS GOG TRYING TO TELL US. HE ASSURED ME THERE WAS NO OTHER MESSAGE INVOLVED AND REPEATED THAT GOG WILL BE PLEASED TO WELCOME A REPLACEMENT.

4. BALDE DID NOT USE THE TERM "PERSONA NON GRATA" AND SET NO DEADLINE FOR BLAND'S DEPARTURE. DESPITE MY QUESTIONS HE GAVE NO HINT THAT USIS PROGRAMS OR RELEASES HAD BEEN OFFENSIVE. HE WORKED HARD TO KEEP INTERVIEW FRIENDLY.

5. BLAND CAN RECALL ONLY ONE CONVERSATION WHICH MIGHT CONCEIVABLY HAVE CAUSED SUCH A REACTION. LAST WEEK, WHEN GOG CENSOR REFUSED PERMIT USIS DISTRIBUTION OF PUBLIC STATEMENTS ON ANGOLA BY PRESIDENT FORD AND SECRETARY KISSINGER, BLAND ARGUED FIRMLY THAT US POLICY SHOULD BE UNDERSTOOD BY GUINEANS EVEN IF NOT AGREED WITH.

6. WITH MY FULL SUPPORT BLAND HAS BEEN DEVELOPING MORE AGGRESSIVE USIS PROGRAMS IN RECENT MONTHS, AND FOR EXAMPLE OPENED GROUND FLOOR OF CHANCERY TWO WEEKS AGO AS PUBLIC EXHIBIT AREA. WE ALSO JUST DISTRIBUTED HARD-HITTING ELLSWORTH SENATE TESTIMONY ON ANGOLA TO GOG OFFICIALS. HOWEVER, BALDE COULD EASILY HAVE OBJECTED TO SPECIFIC PROGRAMS OR DOCUMENTS AND DID NOT DO SO.

7. GOG ACTION MAY BE MEANT AS POLITICAL REBUFF BUT SEEMS TOTALLY OUT OF PHASE WITH CURRENT GOG POLICY CONCERN THAT US BILATERAL RELATIONS AND AID PROGRAMS MAY SUFFER FROM ANGOLA EPISODE. SOVIET PRESSURES COULD BE INVOLVED, BUT THIS ALSO SEEMS ILL-TIMED WHEN USSR IS TRYING QUIETLY TO CONSOLIDATE GAINS OVER ITS ANGOLA ROLE. ON BASIS SLIM AVAILABLE EVIDENCE I TEND TO FEEL BLAND IS VICTIM OF INDIVIDUAL HANGUP OF SOME SORT WITHIN GOG. HYPERSENSITIVE AND HYPER-SUSPICIOUS GOG OFFICIALS ARE RECEPTIVE TO MOST EXAGGERATED XENOPHOBIC ALLEGATIONS (E.G., FORGED DOCUMENTS).
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8. BELIEVE BEST US RESPONSE IS QUIETLY TO REPLACE BLAND AND NOT REGARD THIS AS MAJOR ISSUE BETWEEN US AND GOG. WE HAVE OTHER MORE BASIC ISSUES TO RAISE AND IF BLAND CASE PROVES TO HAVE BROADER POLITICAL BASIS THIS WILL COME TO LIGHT.

9. FOR USIA: COULD JONES OR OTHER REPLACEMENT ARRIVAL BE MOVED

UP TO APRIL OR MAY? FRENCH FLUENCY IS PREREQUISITE. THIS WOULD
PERMIT ME TO TELL GOG WE HAVE ARRANGED FOR REPLACEMENT AS RE-
QUESTED AND TO SEEK AGREEMENT TO HAVE BLAND DEPART IN ORDERLY
FASHION AFTER TWO OR THREE MONTHS. USIA INSPECTORS GRAVES AND
BUMGARDNER WHO ARE CURRENTLY IN CONAKRY MAY COMMENT BY SEPARATE
CABLE REGARDING MODALITIES OF TRANSFER.
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